



# ERUPTIONS

APRIL 6–JUNE 18, 2023

MCA



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COVER:

BARAK ADÉ SOLEIL: Performance view, Barak adé Soleil, *a series of movements*, Claremont, CA. Photo: Marcus Polk. Image description: A brown-skinned, large-bodied Black person with a shaved head and beard, wearing glasses, a black shirt, and grey jeans, with one hand on a rail and the other holding a wheelchair, seemingly floating above a set of stairs.

WILL RAWLS: Photo courtesy of the artist. Image description: A Black person with curly hair wearing a green costume grasps the edge of a piece of green fabric.

SHAMEL PITTS | TRIBE: Performance view, Shamel Pitts and Tushrick Fredericks, *Touch of RED*, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, October 22, 2022. Photo: The Adeboye Brothers. Image description: Two Black people wearing red shorts and tops crouch in a wide-legged stance and lean their heads to touch.

ON STAGE:  
*FRICTIONS*

Shamel Pitts | TRIBE, *Touch of RED*

Edlis Neeson Theater

April 6, 8 pm  
April 7, 8 pm  
April 8, 8 pm

Will Rawls, *[siccer]*

Edlis Neeson Theater

April 27, 7:30 pm  
April 28, 7:30 pm  
April 29, 7:30 pm   
April 30, 2 pm

March 22–June 18: Video installation, first-floor spiral stairwell (east)

Barak adé Soleil, *SHIFT*

MCA Plaza

May 6, 1–5 pm

May 2–June 18: Video installation, first-floor spiral stairwell (west)

- American Sign Language
- Livestream
- Closed Captions
- Audio Description
- Contains Haptic Elements

RELATED  
PROGRAMS

Talk | Shamel Pitts and Jafari S. Allen

Northwestern University  
Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts  
710 N Lake Shore Drive

April 8, 2–3:30 pm

Talk | Will Rawls and Taylor Renee Aldridge

Edlis Neeson Theater

April 29, 2–3:30 pm

Talk | Barak adé Soleil and Guest

MCA Commons

May 2, 6 pm



# CURATOR'S NOTE

This spring's On Stage series, *Frictions*, explores blackness through bodily movement with a suite of performances and video works by Shamel Pitts | TRIBE, Will Rawls, and Barak adé Soleil. In each project, performers navigate the social dynamics of perception, recognition, and prejudice that enact racial distinction, while simultaneously exploring the frictions they encounter as they move through the varying timeframes of performance and dance. As a series, *Frictions* proposes that the resistance and tension that emerge through this navigation is full of productive, transformative potential.

Each work in the series is composed of rhythms, textures, momentums, and exchanges between viewers and performers who co-create their own images in motion. Movement is central to these works and to these artists' practices; moving itself is what distills the particularities of performance—spectacular, theatrical, caught up in the relationship between performer and audience member. Staging their own blackness within the microcosm of the theater and the museum, these artists defy inflexible narratives in which Black people must constantly rehearse and perform traumatic histories. Nonetheless, the macrocosm of our society—in which the movement of Black bodies, particularly those that are queer and disabled, is curtailed and shaped by racism—is always close at hand.

Performance is often called “time-based art”: it moves from beginning to middle to end, with a before, an after, and a transformation in between. To consider Black bodies and lives in relation to motion is to consider them in relation to time: the ways they are complex and changing, rather than monolithic and static. Black studies scholar Michelle M. Wright invites us to consider history alongside the “specific moment in which blackness is being imagined—the ‘now’ through which all imaginings of blackness will be mediated.”<sup>1</sup> Chicago's own Black performance theorist Tina Post identifies the possibility of a “present that contains fleeting encounters with alternative embodiments,” in which race is “used to disrupt the time sheets of nonfreedom.”<sup>2</sup> Liberation from antiblackness may not be possible here and now, but perhaps certain moments of transformation in performance can temporally (and temporarily) suspend the typical workings of perception and expectation.

Each of the three artists in *Frictions* explore questions of temporality as they move through differing timeframes or time signatures. While these distinct syncopations serve as grounding forces in each work, together they point to the many possible relationships to time and body that are possible for Black lives and in Black choreography and performance. *Touch of RED*, by Shamel Pitts | TRIBE, investigates queer intimacy and physical encounters through speed, perpetual motion, powerful pauses, and driving beats, using references to club dancing and competitive boxing. Barak adé Soleil's *SHIFT* explores the liveness and presence of disabled bodies both at rest and in the act of navigating often-inaccessible built environments. Will Rawls's *[siccer]* deploys the staccato of stop-motion animation to disrupt expectations of both the smooth,

continual motion of film and the stillness of static images. In addition to their live performances, Rawls and adé Soleil's works involve video installations presented in the museum's first-floor lobby over the course of several weeks. *Frictions* takes shape in the museum over an extended duration, through these videos and through the artists' fleeting, limited-run performances, creating overlapping timeframes and pathways for experiencing the series itself.

In physics, friction is defined as a “force that resists the sliding or rolling of one solid object over another,” a productive force “that resists relative motion between two bodies in contact.” The performances and associated video projects of *Frictions* might be called “resistive choreographies,” not because they make explicit within them a singular message of resistance against an outside force but rather because they enact resistive contact within their very form as they encounter an audience. Black queer temporalities can be a form of resistance that calls “for a break from the universal structure of the museum, a place that has been invented to capture, preserve, and record time through art and relics of culture, and to ‘conserve’ the spirit in stasis, a perpetual death, structuring its potential (energy) in awe of its entropy,” as Jordan Barrant, Amari Grey, Shameekia Johnson, and Brianna Robinson describe in a 2021 Studio Museum in Harlem panel on museum practice.<sup>3</sup> The force of *Frictions* implicates audiences and performers alike in the friction—and energy—created at their point of encounter: on screen, in public space, and on stage.

— Tara Aisha Willis  
Curator of Performance

- 1 Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 14.
- 2 Tina Post, “Joe Louis's Utopic Glitch,” in *Race and Performance After Repetition*, ed. Soyica Diggs Colbert, Douglas A. Jones Jr., and Shane Vogel (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 105.
- 3 Studio Museum Harlem, *Queer Time and the Museum Professionals Seminar*, 2021, <https://studiomuseum.org/article/queer-time-and-museum>.



A photograph of two Black men in red boxing gear, including trunks and gloves, crouching in a wide-legged stance on a red boxing ring. They are leaning forward, with their heads touching, in a moment of anticipation or connection. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the performers.

SHAMEL PITTS | TRIBE

## ABOUT THE WORK

# Touch of RED

One of the most elemental and brutal sports, boxing is also highly technical. Like dancers, boxers train for years to hone their moves. But what is it about two men trading punches in a ring that enthralls us? Perhaps it allows us to envision what we might do if a similar situation were to arise. Would you battle through the pain? Would you emerge victorious? Why practice for such violent competition? Does what we practice manifest our reality? From these questions stems *Touch of RED*, in which Shamel Pitts and his Brooklyn-based arts collective, TRIBE, turn the boxing ring into a pulsing night club dance floor. TRIBE is comprised of an interdisciplinary group of artists including video mapping and lighting designer Lucca Del Carlo, set designer Mimi Lien, composer Sivan Jacobovitz, and theatrical lighting designer Rus Snelling. With *Touch of RED*, they come together to propose an alternative look at how men can practice relating to each other and the world.

Like all good parties, *Touch of RED* begins with waiting. Held in the lobby until just the right moment, anticipation and collectivity builds amongst audience members as they await their shared experience in the theater. In her writing on queer ball culture, whose parties famously start later than scheduled, scholar Emily Bock theorizes this waiting: "... [it] is an extended moment when we shift our orientation toward building

a world here and now. Waiting is an elongated activation that doesn't rely on a future desired end, but rather generates a temporary collectivity."<sup>1</sup> Once inside the theater, the action is already in motion and continues to build. Driving rhythms support perpetual motion, with projected images casting shadows across the floor and into the audience. The space created by Pitts and fellow performer Tushrik Fredericks is not entirely open to us. At times illuminated by overhead lighting, members of the audience are aware of each other as spectators in contrast to what would usually be an anonymous experience in the deafening darkness of the club. In this way, the boxing ring is transformed into a theater, the theater into a club, and audience members into participants in the action.

Interdisciplinary artist and writer Sable Elyse Smith describes the party as "a moment of suspension" and the "Sensation conjured by this dance" as "void of history, geographic memory, location, or pain. . . . a sensation without scars or muscle memory," later clarifying that "the dance . . . is not an escape. It is a punctuation. It is about claiming an instant of time and something that can be mine completely."<sup>2</sup>

APRIL 6–8 | EDLIS NEESON THEATER

LEFT: Performance view, Shamel Pitts and Tushrik Fredericks, *Touch of RED*, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, October 22, 2022. Photo: The Adeboye Brothers. Image description: Two Black people wearing red shorts and tops crouch in a wide-legged stance and lean their heads to touch.





**LEFT:** Performance view, Shamel Pitts and Tushrick Fredericks, *Touch of RED*, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, October 22, 2022. Photo: The Adeboye Brothers. Image description: Two Black men in red shorts and tops face each other and nearly touch, poised to embrace.

**BELOW:** Performance view, Shamel Pitts and Tushrick Fredericks, *Touch of RED*, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, October 22, 2022. Photo: The Adeboye Brothers. Image description: Two Black men seated on low stools face each other in a dimly lit room.

In *Touch of RED*, Pitts and Fredericks suspend temporality. Their performance is an opportunity to reframe our expectations of time, space, and the markers of normative identity, and an invitation to soften and heal together. In a recent post-performance talk, Pitts reminded the audience that “softness is just a quality,” and though some cultures may associate it with weakness, it can require immense power to engender. In *Touch of RED*, we are invited to practice softening as a way of manifesting a more peaceful existence—perhaps not entirely without conflict, but with more freedom, dignity, and humanity.

— Laura Paige Kyber,  
Curatorial Associate



For more information  
about the artists and  
their collaborators, visit  
[mcachicago.org/touchofred](https://mcachicago.org/touchofred)

Running time is 90 minutes with no intermission.

This performance includes loud, pulsing music and moving lights throughout. The performance includes minimal spoken language.

Captioning, ASL, and audio description will be provided for the April 8 performance.

- 1 Emily R. Bock, “...waiting...,” in *Queer Nightlife*, ed. Kemi Adeyemi, Kareem Khubchandani, and Ramon Rivera-Servera (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2021), 48.
- 2 Sable Elyse Smith, “Ecstatic Resilience,” in *Queer Nightlife*, 126–27.





WILL RAWLS

# [siccer]

APRIL 27–30 | EDLIS NEESON THEATER

## ABOUT THE WORK

Encompassing dance, video, text, and installation, Will Rawls's practice stages failures of communication, calling attention to the flawed terms through which exchange is expected to occur. Inhabiting this gap between expression and comprehension, Rawls's work models alternative languages that allow for more layered and nuanced articulations of selfhood, particularly for Black performers.

*[siccer]* expands upon this idea through its experimentation with stop-motion, a filmmaking technique in which subjects move incrementally between still photographs to produce the illusion of movement. While the subjects of stop-motion films are typically inanimate objects—puppets or clay figures, for instance—the characters that are photographed in Rawls's project are dancers, all of them Black, who are mysteriously trapped in fragmented reenactments of iconic American films. Throughout the performance, which adopts the format of a stop-motion film shoot, an automated camera photographs the performers every few seconds. Here, Rawls invites us to consider the ways in which Black bodies are relentlessly documented, distorted, and circulated within and by the media, often framed as "strange," or thrust into narratives that are not their own. However, the intervals between shutter clicks—as the camera resets to take another photograph—create momentary gaps in time.



**ABOVE:** Photo courtesy of the artist. Image description: The silhouette of a Black man with short, curly hair appears behind a green screen. In three seemingly sequential images, he sits in a low-slung chair and gestures with his hand to indicate speech and thought.

**LEFT:** Photo courtesy of the artist. Image description: A Black person with curly hair wearing a green costume grasps the edge of a piece of green fabric.



BELOW: Photo courtesy of the artist. Image description: A Black man with short curly hair wearing white clothing and a green sequin hat sits on a stool. With his back facing the camera, he stares at his own shadow against a green screen. He holds a microphone in his hand.



These gaps offer fleeting moments of respite from surveillance, creating interludes where the performers can act without being captured in images. *[siccer]* revels in this fundamental paradox of stop-motion, a technique that both incessantly records its subjects and allows for intervals of indeterminacy. Throughout the film shoot, the dancers move in and out of the camera's clicking frame, performing with an acute awareness of their hypervisibility while finding ways to distort the resulting images of themselves through vocal, physical play and improvisation. This live performance of *[siccer]* is accompanied by a video installation, currently on view at the MCA in the first-floor stairwell on the east side of the building, that reimagines the iconic American film at the core of the stage show.

The project's title references the Latin adverb *sic*, which is typically placed in brackets in a text to call attention to instances of "incorrect" spelling or grammar within a piece of writing or spoken quote. Often, *sic* is used in print to designate Black vernacular slang as a deviation from standard English. Rawls's project is to reframe this perceived divergence as a generative performance culture that employs absurdity, misquotation, and illegibility to narrate the world beyond its limiting scripts.

— Nolan Jimbo  
Marjorie Susman Curatorial Fellow



For more information  
about the artists and  
their collaborators, visit  
[mcachicago.org/siccer](https://mcachicago.org/siccer)

Running time is 120 minutes.

This work includes live performances and a video installation on the museum's first floor that runs from March 22 through June 18, 2023.

This performance is improvised and may include some swearing and sexual innuendo.

Captioning, ASL, and audio description will be provided for the April 29 performance.





BARAK ADÉ SOLEIL

# SHIFT

MAY 6 | MCA PLAZA

## ABOUT THE WORK

Barak adé Soleil works from the belief that blackness, disability, and queerness are mutually constitutive and inextricable from each other. adé Soleil's performance and installation work often takes the form of an intervention or assertion within the museum context, challenging business-as-usual within the building's physical structure as well as the institutional histories and ideologies represented by it. adé Soleil's 2015 performance residency at the MCA considered the formal conventions of the Edlis Neeson Theater. Now, in the newly commissioned work *SHIFT*, adé Soleil focuses on the museum's public spaces.

At the start of this project, adé Soleil set out to amplify the presence of Black neurodiverse and disabled bodies through experimentations with scale, seeking to explore the relationship between the museum's expansive, stark surfaces and the work's intimate images of performers. In its final form, *SHIFT* digitally and physically occupies the museum's spiral staircase, an iconic structure that creates a vertical artery between the first floor's theater and the fourth floor's major exhibition spaces—an artery that is nonetheless distinctly inaccessible to people in wheelchairs. The video installation, situated at the base of the stairwell, features an outcropping of skyward-facing video screens that proclaim, with their glow, the presence of the performers' bodies to viewers on all four levels of the museum. The video

documents their bodies, both at rest and in moments of transition and everyday gestures, through constantly shifting camera angles and degrees of proximity, dimensionality, and detail. Framed by the stairwell's spiraling bannisters and vertical ascent, *SHIFT* intends to reveal in these gestures what adé Soleil describes as a charismatic "grandeur."

*SHIFT* will expand to include a live event on May 6, as several local community members assemble to take part in a plaza promenade and stairway ascent at the museum, creating a pathway through its architecture. The event will generate several shifts and frictions: the participants' gestures and breaths taken along their journey, the rub of bodies and wheelchairs along surfaces and steps, the shared experience of multiple people moving together on their own time. Not only do museum architecture, pedestrian traffic patterns, and even viewer attention tend towards ablist, but time itself often operates at certain paces and speeds.

adé Soleil sees *SHIFT* as distinctly not about "slowness" or "stillness." Such words imply that there is a proper pace or degree of perceptibility necessary for movement to be present in a body, and for that movement to be valued in performance (and in the world):

LEFT: Performance view, Barak adé Soleil, *a series of movements*, Claremont, CA. Photo: Marcus Polk. Image description: A brown-skinned, large-bodied Black person with a shaved head and beard, wearing glasses, a black shirt, and grey jeans, with one hand on a rail and the other holding a wheelchair, seemingly floats above a set of stairs.



“For me to authentically move through a world that’s deeply ableist, and alongside capitalism, means I’m constantly moving against the grain of environments that are not built for me. Ultimately, whether or not I desire it, I’m moving through performance: trying to go up and down stairs that I cannot, trying to deal with the elevator that may or may not be working. I have to use my gestures. . . . It becomes a sort of performance. I cannot not do performance. It is an amplification of making space in the world, in the body that I’m in.”

Subtlety might be a better word for the quality of bodily presence adé Soleil foregrounds in *SHIFT*. “Subtle shifts can mean movement and depth of movement,” he says. Bodies in repose, bodies breathing, bodies making small, everyday gestures as they simply exist on camera: all of these are full of movement. The work invites us to alter our perception of speed and slowness, to consider these subtle movements to be, if not large, then certainly major, or, to borrow adé Soleil’s word, grandiose.

adé Soleil aligns *SHIFT* with what scholar Kevin Quashie has called “black aliveness”: What if artworks were created from the assumption that the humanity of Black disabled people is already a given?<sup>1</sup> The video installation for *SHIFT* could help, as Quashie puts it, to “imagine a Black world,”<sup>2</sup> “a scene of aliveness, a world of us”<sup>3</sup> that is not detached from the ways that both blackness and disability are, over and over, closely linked with death in our society, but that nonetheless remains busy with its own imagining otherwise. adé Soleil describes the title *SHIFT* as being partially about shifting perceptions and expectations of what Black, disabled, neurodiverse, queer

bodies are, as well as what they do and where they can be. The performance could also be understood to insist on its own timeframe, its own strategies for traversing the museum: an act in friction with the built environment, certainly, but also an act carried out on terms and in timeframes created and sustained by the artists in their present moment. What if simply being—being present, being alive, being as you must be, which is to say being as you are—is already plenty?

— Tara Aisha Willis  
Curator of Performance



For more information about the artists and their collaborators, visit [mcachicago.org/shift](https://mcachicago.org/shift)

Running time is four hours.

This work includes a live event on May 6, and a video installation on the museum’s first floor that runs from May 2 through June 18, 2023.

This event is durational and will move through different areas of the museum, including the MCA Plaza and front steps, the northwest spiral staircase, and both public lobbies. The majority of the event will take place in the spiral staircase on the west side of the museum’s first floor, and will be visible from various angles on multiple floors. The available space for viewers will change based on the location of the promenade as it moves through the museum, and MCA staff will be available to facilitate the audience’s movement to maintain

access to elevators, passageways, and stairwells. Portable stools will be available for visitors who wish to use them, where possible.

ASL interpretation will be provided. Designated areas for wheelchair and mobility device users will be available on the staircase landings. Live audio description will be provided: devices will be available at the museum and audience members may also use their personal devices to access the audio description through a URL provided on-site.

For the most up to date accessibility information, please check the webpage [mcachicago.org/shift](https://mcachicago.org/shift) or contact the box office at 312-397-4010.

**ABOVE:** Photo: courtesy of the artist. Image description: The artist, a dark brown-skinned, large-bodied Black person with a shaved head and salt and pepper beard, is wearing black-rimmed glasses, a plaid collared shirt, and black jeans. Using heavy-duty gloves, he grabs two large, white, braided ropes that are attached to two separate building columns, while moving towards a group of diverse audience members. Holding onto the ropes allows him to lean forward in a manner that is intentionally precarious.

1 Kevin Quashie, *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 1.  
2 Quashie, 13.  
3 Quashie, 5.



SUPPORT

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ABOUT PERFORMANCE AT THE MCA

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is committed to fostering social connections and presenting the most thought-provoking creative arts of our time. The MCA commissions and presents performing arts and opportunities for dialogue with leading artists and scholars from Chicago and around the world. These events serve as spaces for gathering throughout the museum and online. The MCA’s groundbreaking live experiences are an integral part of the museum’s cutting-edge, multidisciplinary programming. Along with exhibitions, publications, and programs, MCA Performance and Public Practice welcomes visitors to experience the work and ideas of living artists and exercise their own civic voices.

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